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# Incremental perspective for feature selection based on fuzzy rough sets

Yanyan Yang, Degang Chen, Hui Wang, and Xizhao Wang, *Fellow, IEEE*

**Abstract**—Feature selection based on fuzzy rough sets is an effective approach to select a compact feature subset that optimally predicts a given decision label. Despite being studied extensively, most existing methods of fuzzy rough set based feature selection are restricted to computing the whole data set in batch, which is often costly or even intractable for large data sets. To improve the time efficiency, we investigate the incremental perspective for fuzzy rough set based feature selection assuming data can be presented in sample subsets one after another. The key challenge for the incremental perspective is how to add and delete features with the subsequent arrival of sample subsets. We tackle this challenge with strategies of adding and deleting features based on the relative discernibility relations that are updated as subsets arrive sequentially. Two incremental algorithms for fuzzy rough set based feature selection are designed based on the strategies. One updates the selected features as each sample subset arrives, and outputs the final feature subset where no sample subset is left. The other updates the relative discernibility relations but only performs feature selection where there is no further subset arriving. Experimental comparisons suggest our incremental algorithms expedite fuzzy rough set based feature selection without compromising performance.

**Index Terms**—Feature selection, fuzzy rough sets, attribute reduction, incremental learning, relative discernibility relation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Feature selection is a commonly used preprocessing step in machine learning, data mining and pattern recognition. It is a process of selecting a compact and informative subset from the original features that can be used for building a satisfactory predictive model [1], [2]. In recent years, data has become increasingly larger and larger in both size and dimensionality, which poses serious challenges for most of the existing feature selection algorithms. Therefore, efficient feature selection from large data sets is one such challenge.

Fuzzy rough set theory [3],[4] provides the basis for an effective approach to feature selection through the use of a fuzzy similarity relation, which describes the similarity

between pairs of data samples (i.e., instances). Fuzzy rough set is mainly used in classification to address the inconsistency between features and decision labels, i.e., some samples have the similar feature values but different decision labels. The inconsistency can be measured by using the lower approximation in fuzzy rough sets to assign a membership to every sample with respect to decision labels. By keeping the membership of every sample unchanged, fuzzy rough set based feature selection, usually called attribute reduction, can remove redundant or irrelevant features to find an informative feature subset [6].

Despite the extensive investigation in literature, most existing methods of fuzzy rough set based feature selection are restricted to the batch processing, which handles all samples of a data set in batch mode all at once. Quite often, this is uneconomic, and even impractical for large data sets that easily exceed the memory capacity. This reveals one weakness of those batch algorithms in terms of the runtime. New feature selection algorithms are thus needed that scale well with the increase of data size[7], [8]. Incremental feature selection has been explored recently to deal with the case in which data arrives sequentially (that is dynamic) or a large data set (due to its big size) has to be cut into small subsets which are then presented sequentially. There are some state-of-the-art methods for incremental feature selection based on rough sets. Although these incremental methods are more efficient than batch feature selection methods based on rough sets, they do not provide an essential insight into the incremental mechanism of fuzzy rough set based feature selection from the viewpoint of the successive arrival of sample subsets.

Motivated by the above observations, we take an incremental approach where a real-valued data set is divided into a sequence of sample subsets that are added in succession, and each sample subset is sequentially processed upon its arrival. In the the incremental approach, we present the strategies of adding and deleting features based on the relative discernibility relations that are updated as sample subsets arrive continuously. Based on the strategies, we design two incremental algorithms for fuzzy rough set based feature selection: 1) updating the selected feature subset where each sample subset arrives, and 2) only performing feature selection where no sample subset is left. In the first version, upon the arrival of each subset, the relative discernibility relations of each feature and the feature set are incrementally computed to update the selected feature subset. When there is no further sample subset arriving, the feature subset will become the final one for the whole data set. In the second version, we update the relative discernibility relations of each feature and the feature set every time a sample subset arrives. When no further subset arrives,

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Y.Y. Yang is with the School of Control and Computer Engineering, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China, and with the School of Science, Beijing University of Civil Engineering and Architecture, Beijing, China (e-mail: hrsinbba@163.com).

D.G. Chen is with the Department of Mathematics and Physics, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China(e-mail: wscz973@163.com).

H. Wang is with the School of Computing and Mathematics, University of Ulster, Northern Ireland, UK(email: h.wang@ulster.ac.uk).

X.Z. Wang is with the College of Computer Science & Software Engineering, Shenzhen University, Shenzhen, China(email: xizhaowang@ieee.org).

the obtained relative discernibility relations are used to search for the final feature subset. Theoretically, it is clear that the second algorithm is more efficient than the first one as it does not update the feature subset every time a sample subset arrives. This fact will be validated in our experimental results.

The unique contributions that distinguish the proposed work from the existing batch feature selection methods and incremental feature selection methods in the framework of rough sets are threefold: 1) our work integrates the incremental fashion into fuzzy rough set based feature selection from a data set; 2) the strategies of adding and deleting features are developed based on the updated relative discernibility relations of each feature and the feature set; and 3) two efficient incremental algorithms for fuzzy rough set based feature selection are presented to start with an empty set to compute a reduct from the data set, with extensive experimental comparisons.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Related works are discussed in Section II. In Section III, some preliminaries on fuzzy rough sets are presented. In Section IV, the relative discernibility relation based algorithm for feature selection is presented based on fuzzy rough sets. The incremental algorithms of fuzzy rough set based feature selection are presented in Section V. In Section VI, experimental results demonstrate the time efficiency of our proposed incremental algorithms without sacrificing the quality of selected features. This paper is concluded with a summary in Section VII.

## II. RELATED WORKS

Our work to be presented in this paper is closely related to the following studies: the batch methods of fuzzy rough set based feature selection, rough set based incremental rules, rough set based incremental approximations, and rough set based incremental feature selection. Below we review some important related works in terms of the above four aspects.

### A. Batch methods of fuzzy rough set based feature selection

Many efforts have been made to investigate fuzzy rough set based feature selection. As a pioneering work on fuzzy rough set based feature selection, Jesen and Shen [9] proposed a dependency function based heuristic algorithm to find a reduct. Other research works on fuzzy rough set based feature selection mostly improve the method in [9]. For example, Bhatt et al. [10] defined a compact domain to improve the time efficiency of the algorithm in [9]. Hu et al. [11] proposed an information entropy based algorithm for feature selection with fuzzy rough sets. In [12], a fuzzy extension to crisp discernibility matrices was proposed to search for a feature subset. It has been noted in [13] that these heuristic algorithms cannot find a proper reduct but an over-reduct or under-reduct due to their stop criteria. To find proper reducts, Tsang et al. [5] introduced the discernibility matrix based approach to fuzzy rough sets, which requires heavy computational load since it computes and searches for every element in the discernibility matrix. To improve the time efficiency in [5], Chen et al. [13] developed the sample pair selection method to search for all minimal elements in the discernibility matrix, and only employed all minimal elements to find reducts of a

fuzzy decision table. Wang et al. [14] proposed a fitting model for fuzzy rough set based feature selection to better reflect the classification ability of a selected feature subset.

Despite the extensive investigations in literature, the works discussed above are restricted to the batch computing, which handles all samples of a data set all at once. Such batch methods are often costly, and even intractable for large data sets that easily exceed the memory capacity. This inevitably poses great challenges to traditional batch methods of fuzzy rough set based feature selection. As an efficient technique, the incremental approach has been introduced into rough sets to update knowledge such as decision rules, approximations, feature selection from dynamic data sets in which samples, features or feature values vary with time.

### B. Rough set based incremental decision rules

There are several works for updating decision rules from dynamic data sets. Fan et al. [15] proposed an incremental method for updating decision rules by analysing different cases of strength index change. Shan et al. [16] updated decision rules by updating the decision matrices and decision functions at the arrival of a sample. A rule induction method was proposed in [17] based on fuzzy rough sets when samples vary. Zheng et al. [18] investigated a tree-based method of updating decision rules with the arrival of samples. Blaszczynski and Slowinski [19] proposed an algorithm for updating decision rules in terms of adding samples by extending Apriori algorithm to the variable consistency dominance-based rough set. Tripathy et al. [20] proposed an ELEM based algorithm to update decision rules with the arrival of a sample. Tsumoto [21] proposed an algorithm for updating decision rules based on the accuracy and coverage with the arrival of a sample. When coarsening and refining attribute values, Chen et al. [22] investigated the dynamic maintenance of decision rules.

### C. Rough set based incremental approximations

Many researchers have focused on incrementally updating approximations based on rough sets with the variations of the feature set, the feature value and the sample set, respectively.

With the variation of the feature set, Chan [23] presented an incremental method for updating approximations. Li et al. [24] proposed methods to update approximations of the characteristic relation based rough sets by the variations of the upper and lower boundary regions. Cheng [25] proposed two incremental methods for fast computing the rough fuzzy approximation based on the boundary set and the cut sets of a fuzzy set, respectively. Zhang et al. [26] proposed an incremental approach for updating approximations of set-valued information systems based on the probabilistic neighborhood rough set model. Li et al. [27] proposed an incremental algorithm for updating approximations based on  $P$ -generalized decision of a sample. Luo et al. [28] focused on dynamically maintaining approximations in set-valued ordered decision systems. Yang et al. [29] updated multigranulation rough approximations with the increasing of granular structures. Liu et al. [30] investigated the incremental method of updating approximations in probabilistic rough sets.

Chen et al. [31] proposed an incremental algorithm for approximations of a concept when coarsening or refining feature values. In incomplete ordered decision systems, Chen et al. [32] presented a method to dynamically maintain approximations of upward and downward unions when feature values change. Luo et al. [33] proposed two incremental algorithms for computing rough approximations with respect to the addition and removal of criteria values.

With varying the sample set, Chen et al. [34] designed incremental methods for updating approximations based on variable precision rough set model. Zhang et al. [35] proposed a method of updating approximations based on neighborhood rough sets. Li et al. [36] proposed a dynamic maintenance approach for updating approximations in the ordered information system. Luo et al. [37] presented two incremental algorithms for computing approximations in disjunctive/conjunctive set-valued information systems. Zhang et al. [38] developed a novel matrix-based algorithm for fast updating approximations in dynamic composite information systems. Zeng et al. [39] proposed an incremental approach for updating approximations of Gaussian kernelized fuzzy rough sets with the variation of the sample set. Luo et al. [40] proposed incremental algorithms for updating approximations in decision theoretic rough sets with respect to the addition and deletion of samples.

#### D. Rough set based incremental feature selection

Many attempts have been made to investigate rough set based incremental feature selection with the variations of the feature set, the feature values and the sample set, respectively.

When adding features, Wang et al. [41] developed a dimension (i.e., feature) incremental strategy for feature subset based on the updating mechanisms of three measures of information entropy. With adding and deleting features, Shu et al. [42] proposed two algorithms for updating feature selection by the incremental computation of the positive region in incomplete decision systems. As the feature set varies dynamically, an incremental feature selection algorithm was proposed in [43] by updating knowledge granulation in the set-valued information system. When adding and deleting features, Zeng et al. [44] employed the dependency function to analyse the incremental mechanisms for feature selection based on Gaussian kernelized fuzzy rough sets in hybrid information systems.

With dynamically varying feature values, Wang et al. [45] developed an incremental algorithm for feature selection based on the incremental computation of three representative information entropy. For single sample and multiple samples with varying feature values, Shu et al. [46] developed two incremental feature selection algorithms based on the incremental computation of the positive region.

With the arrival of a sample, Liu [47] proposed an incremental feature selection algorithm to find the minimal reduct from an information system without decision labels. When adding a new sample into a decision table, Hu et al. [48] proposed an incremental feature selection based on the positive region. Afterward, Hu et al. [49] proposed an incremental algorithm for finding all reducts based on the modified discernibility matrix. At the arrival of a new sample, Yang [50] proposed

an incremental feature selection algorithm by updating the discernibility matrix. At the arrival of a sample, Chen et al. [51] proposed an incremental algorithm for feature selection based on variable precision rough sets by the strategies of adding and deleting features. As a sample with real-valued features arrives, Li et al. [60] investigated the incremental mechanisms for feature selection based on neighborhood rough sets. When a group of samples arrives, Liang et al. [52] developed a group incremental algorithm for feature selection based on the investigation of incremental mechanisms for three measures of information entropy including Shannon's entropy, complementary entropy and combination entropy. To address the time/space complexity issue of the current incremental feature selection algorithms, Yang et al. [53] presented a novel incremental algorithm for rough set based feature selection by integrating an active sample selection process which discards useless incoming samples and selects useful incoming samples into the feature selection process which determines how to add and delete features in the current selected feature subset.

From what have been discussed above, fuzzy rough set based feature selection has not yet been studied incrementally from the viewpoint of the sample subset sequence, where a data set is divided into a sequence of sample subsets to be added in succession. This motivates our study in this paper.

### III. PRELIMINARIES

This section reviews fuzzy logical operators, fuzzy approximation operators and fuzzy rough set based feature selection.

#### A. Fuzzy logical operators

In this subsection, we present and exemplify five fuzzy logical operators [3], [54], namely,  $t$ -norm,  $t$ -conorm, negator, dual, residual implication and its dual operation.

$t$ -norm is a function  $T : [0, 1] \times [0, 1] \rightarrow [0, 1]$  satisfying 1) commutativity:  $T(x, y) = T(y, x)$ ; 2) associativity:  $T(T(x, y), z) = T(x, T(y, z))$ ; 3) monotonicity:  $x \leq \alpha$ ,  $y \leq \beta$ ,  $T(x, y) \leq T(\alpha, \beta)$ ; 4) boundary condition:  $T(x, 1) = T(1, x) = x$ . The most popular continuous  $t$ -norms include the standard  $\min$  operator  $T_M(x, y) = \min\{x, y\}$ , the algebraic product  $T_P(x, y) = x \cdot y$ , and the Lukasiewicz  $t$ -norm  $T_L(x, y) = \max\{0, x + y - 1\}$ .

$t$ -conorm is an increasing, commutative and associative function  $S : [0, 1] \times [0, 1] \rightarrow [0, 1]$  satisfying the boundary condition  $\forall x \in [0, 1]$ ,  $S(x, 0) = x$ . The well-known continuous  $t$ -conorms include the standard  $\max$  operator  $S_M(x, y) = \max\{x, y\}$ , the probabilistic sum  $S_P(x, y) = x + y - x \cdot y$ , and the bounded sum  $S_L(x, y) = \min\{1, x + y\}$ .

A negator  $N$  is a decreasing function  $N : [0, 1] \rightarrow [0, 1]$  satisfying  $N(0) = 1$  and  $N(1) = 0$ .  $N_S(x) = 1 - x$  is called the standard negator. A negator  $N$  is called involutive if  $N(N(x)) = x$ ,  $\forall x \in [0, 1]$ . A  $t$ -norm  $T$  and a  $t$ -conorm  $S$  are called dual with respect to  $N$  iff  $S(N(x), N(y)) = N(T(x, y))$  and  $T(N(x), N(y)) = N(S(x, y))$ .

Let  $X : U \rightarrow [0, 1]$  be a fuzzy set and  $F(U)$  be the fuzzy power set on  $U$ . For each  $X \in F(U)$ , the symbol  $co_N X$  is denoted as the fuzzy complement of  $X$  determined by a negator  $N$ , i.e., for every  $x \in U$ ,  $(co_N X)(x) = N(N(x))$ .

Given a lower semicontinuous triangular norm  $T$ , the  $T$ -residuated implication is a function  $\vartheta : [0, 1] \times [0, 1] \rightarrow [0, 1]$  satisfying  $\vartheta(x, y) = \sup\{z \in [0, 1] : T(x, z) \leq y\}$  for  $\forall x, y \in [0, 1]$ .  $T$ -residuated implications include the Lukasiewicz implication  $\vartheta_L$  based on  $T_L : \vartheta_L(x, y) = \min\{1 - x + y, 1\}$ .

Given an upper semicontinuous triangular conorm  $S$ , the dual of  $T$ -residuated implication with respect to  $N$  is a function  $\sigma : [0, 1] \times [0, 1] \rightarrow [0, 1]$  that satisfies  $\sigma(x, y) = \inf\{z \in [0, 1], S(x, z) \geq y\}$  for every  $x, y \in [0, 1]$ .  $\vartheta$  and  $\sigma$  are dual in terms of  $N$  if  $\forall x, y \in [0, 1]$ ,  $\sigma(x, y) = N(\vartheta(N(x), N(y)))$  or  $\vartheta(x, y) = N(\sigma(N(x), N(y)))$ .

### B. Fuzzy rough sets

Let  $U$  be a finite set of samples and  $R$  a binary relation on  $U$ ,  $R$  is called a fuzzy  $T$ -similarity relation if for  $\forall x, y, z \in U$ , it satisfies reflexivity ( $R(x, x) = 1$ ), symmetry ( $R(x, y) = R(y, x)$ ),  $T$ -transitive ( $T(R(x, y), R(y, z)) \leq R(x, z)$ ).

Fuzzy rough sets were introduced by Dubois and Prade[3], [4], and then studied in [58], [59]. For  $\forall X \in F(U)$ , the fuzzy approximation operators can be summarized as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}\overline{R_T}X(x) &= \sup_{u \in U} T(R(x, u), X(u)); \\ \underline{R_S}X(x) &= \inf_{u \in U} S(N(R(x, u)), X(u)); \\ \overline{R_\sigma}X(x) &= \sup_{u \in U} \sigma(N(R(x, u)), X(u)); \\ \underline{R_\vartheta}X(x) &= \inf_{u \in U} \vartheta(R(x, u), X(u)).\end{aligned}$$

From the viewpoint of the granular computing,  $(\overline{R_T}, \underline{R_\vartheta})$  and  $(\overline{R_\sigma}, \underline{R_S})$  are two pairs of approximation operators, since they can be represented by their individual fuzzy granules:  $\overline{R_T}x_\lambda$  and  $\overline{R_\sigma}x_\lambda$ . Based on the granular structure, Chen et al. [55] characterized fuzzy rough set based feature selection. Due to space limitations, this paper only concerns about the pair  $(\overline{R_T}, \underline{R_\vartheta})$ , and it has been noted in [55] that the corresponding conclusions for the pair  $(\overline{R_\sigma}, \underline{R_S})$  can be similarly obtained.

### C. Fuzzy rough set based feature selection

In this subsection, we mainly review fuzzy rough set based feature selection, and the discernibility matrix based approach to obtain a selected feature subset [55].

In this paper,  $(U, R \cup D)$  is used to represent a fuzzy decision system, where  $U$  is the universe of discourse,  $R$  is the set of real-valued features, and  $D = \{d\}$  is the set of symbol decision feature. The subset  $P \subseteq R$  can be represented by a fuzzy  $T$ -similarity relation  $P(x, y)$  for  $\forall x, y \in U$ , and  $P(x, y) = \min_{a \in P} (a(x, y))$ . Where no confusion arises, we use the set  $R$  to represent its corresponding similarity relation in the rest of this paper.

Assume  $U/D = \{[x]_D : x \in U\}$  is the decision partition of  $U$ , where  $[x]_D = \{y \in U : d(x) = d(y)\}$  is called the decision class to which the sample  $x$  belongs. The membership function of the decision class  $[x]_D$  is defined as  $[x]_D(y) = \begin{cases} 1, & y \in [x]_D; \\ 0, & y \notin [x]_D. \end{cases}$  Thus, for  $x \in U$ , we have  $\overline{R_T}[y]_D(x) = \sup_{u \in [y]_D} R(x, u)$  and  $\underline{R_\vartheta}[y]_D(x) = \inf_{u \notin [y]_D} \vartheta(R(x, u), 0)$ .

The positive region of  $R$  with respect to  $D$  is defined as  $Pos_R(D)(x) = \bigcup_{X \in U/D} \underline{R_\vartheta}X(x)$  for every  $x \in U$ .

According to [56],  $Pos_R(D)(x) = \underline{R_\vartheta}[x]_D(x)$  holds for  $\forall x \in U$ , which actually means that the membership degree of each sample belonging to the positive region gets its value at the lower approximation of its corresponding decision class. By preserving the positive region unchanged, fuzzy rough set based feature selection is defined as follows.

**Definition 1** ([56]). Let  $(U, R \cup D)$  be a fuzzy decision table. A subset  $P \subseteq R$  is called a reduct of  $R$  relative to  $D$ , if the following conditions are satisfied: 1)  $Pos_P(D)(x) = Pos_R(D)(x)$  for  $\forall x \in U$ ; 2) for  $\forall a \in P$ , there exists  $y \in U$  satisfying  $Pos_{P-\{a\}}(D)(y) < Pos_R(D)(y)$ .

The first condition means that a reduct  $P$  can preserve the positive region. The second one implies that for  $\forall a \in P$ ,  $P - \{a\}$  cannot preserve the positive region. Hence, a reduct  $P$  is a minimal feature subset that keeps the positive region. As a commonly used procedure for reducts, the discernibility matrix based approach in [5] is briefly stated as follows.

Let  $U = \{x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n\}$ ,  $M_D(U, R) = (c_{ij})_{n \times n}$  is called the discernibility matrix of  $(U, R \cup D)$ , if

$$c_{ij} = \begin{cases} \{a \in R : T(a(x_i, x_j), \lambda(x_i)) = 0\}, & d(x_i) \neq d(x_j); \\ \emptyset, & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

is the discernibility feature set discerning  $(x_i, x_j)$ .  $\lambda(x_i) = Pos_R(D)(x_i) = \inf_{u \notin [x_i]_D} \vartheta(R(x_i, u), 0)$  is the membership degree of  $x_i$  belonging to the positive region.

$f_D(U, R) = \bigwedge_{\substack{c_{ij} \in M_D(U, R) \\ c_{ij} \neq \emptyset}} \{\bigvee c_{ij}\}$  is called the discernibility function of  $(U, R \cup D)$ . If  $f_D(U, R) = \bigvee_{k=1}^t (\bigwedge A_k)$  is the minimal disjunctive normal form of  $f_D(U, R)$ ,  $Red_D(R) = \{A_1, \dots, A_t\}$  is then the set of all the reducts. The intersection of all the reducts is denoted as  $Core_D(R) = \bigcap Red_D(R)$ , which is called the relative core of  $(U, R \cup D)$ . However, it is sufficient to find one reduct in many real-world applications. The following theorems are the basis of finding a reduct.

**Theorem 1** ([57]).  $Core_D(R) = \{a : c_{ij} = \{a\} \in M_D(U, R)\}$ .

**Theorem 2** ([57]).  $P \subseteq R$  is a reduct of  $R$  iff the following conditions hold: (1)  $P \cap c_{ij} \neq \emptyset$  for  $\forall c_{ij} \neq \emptyset$ ; (2) for  $\forall a \in P$ , there exists  $c_{ij} \neq \emptyset$  satisfying  $(P - \{a\}) \cap c_{ij} = \emptyset$ .

Theorem 1 implies that the core is the union of all singletons in the discernibility matrix, whereas Theorem 2 is a convenient way to test if a feature subset is a reduct. The first condition states that it is enough to use a reduct to together distinguish the sample pairs, of which the corresponding discernibility feature sets are not empty; the second one states that each feature in  $P$  is individually necessary. Therefore, a reduct is a minimal feature subset discerning these sample pairs, of which the corresponding discernibility feature sets are not empty.

## IV. THE RELATIVE DISCERNIBILITY RELATION PRESERVED ALGORITHM FOR FUZZY ROUGH SET BASED FEATURE SELECTION

The relative discernibility relation of a feature was introduced in [13],[57] to characterize indispensable and dispensable condition features. In this section, the relative discernibility relation is employed to characterize fuzzy rough set based

feature selection. By preserving the relative discernibility relation of the feature set, an algorithm is then developed to select a feature subset based on fuzzy rough sets.

**Definition 2** ([57]). Let  $(U, R \cup D)$  be a fuzzy decision table. The relative discernibility relation of  $a \in R$  with respect to  $D$  is defined as  $DIS(a) = \{(x_i, x_j) : T(a(x_i, x_j), \lambda(x_i)) = 0, d(x_i) \neq d(x_j)\}$  where  $\lambda(x_i) = Pos_R(D)(x_i)$ .

The relative discernibility relation of a feature is actually the set of all sample pairs that can be discerned by this feature. That is,  $(x_i, x_j) \in DIS(a)$  means that the feature  $a$  can discern the sample pair  $(x_i, x_j)$ . By Definition 2,  $(x_i, x_j) \in DIS(a)$  indicates that  $a \in c_{ij}$  holds for every  $c_{ij} \neq \emptyset$ . This fact implies  $c_{ij} = \{a \in R : (x_i, x_j) \in DIS(a)\}$  and  $DIS(a) = \{(x_i, x_j) : a \in c_{ij}\}$ . The relative discernibility relation of  $R$  is denoted by  $DIS(R) = \bigcup_{a \in R} DIS(a)$ . With the relative discernibility relation, we develop the following theorem to characterize the core.

**Theorem 3.**  $Core_D(R) = \{a \in R : \exists(x_i, x_j) \in DIS(a), s.t. (x_i, x_j) \notin DIS(R - \{a\})\}$ .

By Theorem 3, if there exists a sample pair that can only be discerned by the feature  $a$  but cannot be discerned by any feature in  $R - \{a\}$ , then  $a$  belongs to the core. Based on the relative discernibility relation, we develop the following theorem to characterize fuzzy rough set based feature selection.

**Theorem 4.** A subset  $P \subseteq R$  is a reduct of  $R$  if and only if the following conditions hold: (1)  $DIS(P) = DIS(R)$ ; (2)  $\forall a \in P, DIS(P - \{a\}) \neq DIS(R)$ .

**Proof:** (1)  $DIS(R) = DIS(P) \Leftrightarrow \forall(x_i, x_j) \in DIS(R), (x_i, x_j) \in DIS(P) \Leftrightarrow \forall(x_i, x_j) \in DIS(R), \exists a \in P, s.t., (x_i, x_j) \in DIS(a) \Leftrightarrow \forall c_{ij} \neq \emptyset, \exists a \in P, s.t., a \in c_{ij} \Leftrightarrow \forall c_{ij} \neq \emptyset, P \cap c_{ij} \neq \emptyset$ .

(2)  $\forall a \in P, DIS(P - \{a\}) \neq DIS(R) \Leftrightarrow \forall a \in P, \exists(x_i, x_j) \in DIS(R), s.t., (x_i, x_j) \notin DIS(P - \{a\}) \Leftrightarrow \forall a \in P, \exists c_{ij} \neq \emptyset, s.t., (P - \{a\}) \cap c_{ij} = \emptyset$ .  $\square$

According to Theorem 4, fuzzy rough set based feature selection is a minimal feature subset discerning sample pairs that can be discerned by  $R$ . Based on this, we can design the relative discernibility relation preserved algorithm for finding one reduct with fuzzy rough sets.

#### Algorithm 1 Fuzzy rough set based feature selection(FS-FRS)

**Input:** A fuzzy decision table  $(U, R \cup D)$ .

**Output:** A feature subset of  $(U, R \cup D)$ :  $red$ .

- 1: For each  $x_i \in U$ , compute  $\lambda(x_i) = R_{\theta}[x_i]_D(x_i)$ ;
- 2: For each feature  $a \in R$ , compute  $DIS(a)$ , and  $DIS(R)$ ;
- 3: Compute  $Core_D(R)$  according to Theorem 3;
- 4: Let  $red = Core_D(R)$  and  $DIS(red) = \bigcup_{a \in Core_D(R)} DIS(a)$ ;
- 5: **while**  $DIS(R) \neq DIS(red)$  **do**
- 6:   Select  $a_0 \in R - red$  satisfying

$$|DIS(red \cup \{a_0\})| = \max_{a \in R - red} \{|DIS(red \cup \{a\})|\}$$

- 7:   Let  $red = red \cup \{a_0\}$ ,  $DIS(red) = DIS(red) \cup DIS(a_0)$ ;
- 8: **end while**
- 9: **return**  $red$ .

By preserving the relative discernibility relation of  $R$ ,

Algorithm 1 computes one reduct from a fuzzy decision table. Step 1 computes the membership degree of each sample belonging to the positive region in a fuzzy decision table with a time complexity of  $O(|U|^2 |D|)$ . Step 2 computes the relative discernibility relations of each feature and the feature set with a time complexity of  $O(|U|^2 |R|)$ . Step 3 computes the core of the fuzzy decision table with a time complexity of  $O(|U|^2 |R|)$ . Steps 5~8 always select a feature that maximizes the increment of sample pairs at each loop, with a time complexity of  $O(|U|^2 |R|)$ . To sum up, the time complexity of Algorithm 1 is  $O(|U|^2 |R|)$ .

Algorithm 1 is a novel structural method of discerning sample pairs for selecting features. Our experimental part will demonstrate its feasibility and effectiveness. Algorithm 1 further provides the theoretical foundation for the incremental perspective of fuzzy rough set based feature selection in the next section, and will be a baseline algorithm in our experimental comparisons. As with all fuzzy rough set based batch methods, however, Algorithm 1 computes all samples of a dataset all at once. For large data sets, they are often costly, and even impractical since they easily exceed the memory capacity. In order to enhance the efficacy of the batch methods, the next section will study the incremental solution to fuzzy rough set based feature selection.

#### V. INCREMENTAL PERSPECTIVE FOR FUZZY ROUGH SET BASED FEATURE SELECTION

This section investigates the incremental perspective for fuzzy rough set based feature selection assuming data can be presented in sample subsets that arrive one after another. Rather than computing all samples of the data set in batch, we handle sample subsets one by one so that fuzzy rough set based feature selection can be performed from the incremental perspective. An incremental manner is first employed to compute the relative discernibility relations of each feature and the feature set with sample subsets arriving continuously. Based on the updated relations, an insight into the incremental process of feature selection is gained to reveal how to add and delete features. By the adoption of the incremental process, two incremental algorithms for fuzzy rough set based feature selection are designed to employ the incremental fashion to compute a reduct from a real-valued data set.

##### A. Incremental environment and notations

This subsection describes the incremental environment and the used symbols.

We assume that  $(U, R \cup D)$  is a fuzzy decision table in this paper. In order to employ the incremental fashion to compute a reduct of  $(U, R \cup D)$ , we divide the universe  $U$  into a sample subset sequence  $\{U_k\}_{k=1}^m$ , each of which is called an incoming subset. Clearly, the following conditions must be satisfied:

- (1)  $U = \bigcup_{k=1}^m U_k$ ;
- (2)  $U_i \cap U_j = \emptyset$  for  $i \neq j$ .

In our incremental environment, sample subsets arrive one by one. The previously arriving subsets are stored in a temporary pool  $T$  that is initialized to an empty set. More specially, when  $U_1$  is added into  $T$ , the temporary pool is updated as  $U_1$ ;

with  $U_2$  arriving, the temporary pool is changed into  $U_1 \cup U_2$ ;  $\dots$ ; with  $U_m$  arriving, the temporary pool is changed into the whole universe  $U$ . In a word, the temporary pool  $T$  always changes as the first,  $\dots$ ,  $m$ th subsets arrive successively.

In the temporary decision table  $(T, R \cup D)$ ,  $\lambda_T(x_i)$  is the membership degree of  $x_i \in T$  belonging to the positive region of  $(T, R \cup D)$ ,  $DIS_T(a)$  is the relative discernibility relation of  $a \in R$ ,  $DIS_T(R)$  is the relative discernibility relation of  $R$ , and  $red_T$  is a reduct of  $(T, R \cup D)$ . Before adding any subset from  $U$ , all results from  $(T, R \cup D)$  are empty since the temporary pool  $T$  is initialized to the empty set. In an incoming decision sub-table  $(U_k, R \cup D)$ ,  $\lambda_k(x_i)$  is the membership degree of  $x_i \in U_k$  belonging to the positive region of  $(U_k, R \cup D)$ ,  $DIS_k(a)$  is the relative discernibility relation of  $a \in R$ , and  $DIS_k(R)$  is the relative discernibility relation of  $R$ . With  $U_k$  arriving, the temporary decision table is changed into  $(T \cup U_k, R \cup D)$ . Based on the previously results, we can incrementally compute the membership degree  $\lambda(x_i)$  for  $x_i \in T \cup U_k$ ,  $DIS(a)$ ,  $DIS(R)$ , and  $red_T$  in  $(T \cup U_k, R \cup D)$ . It is evident that we obtain a reduct of  $(U, R \cup D)$  when there is no incoming sample subset.

### B. Updating the relative discernibility relation

From what has been discussed in Section III, the membership degree of each sample belonging to the positive region is a necessary step in computing the relative discernibility relation of each feature. Thus, this subsection first incrementally computes the membership degree with the arrival of a sample subset, and then incrementally computes the relative discernibility relations of each feature and the feature set.

When a sub-table  $(U_k, R \cup D)$  is added into  $(T, R \cup D)$ , the following theorem gains an insight into the incremental computation of  $\lambda(x_i)$  for  $x_i \in T \cup U_k$ .

**Theorem 5.** For  $x_i \in T \cup U_k$ , we have

$$\lambda(x_i) = \begin{cases} \lambda_T(x_i) \wedge \inf_{u \in U_k, d(x_i) \neq d(u)} \vartheta(R(x_i, u), 0), & x_i \in T, \\ \lambda_k(x_i) \wedge \inf_{u \in T, d(x_i) \neq d(u)} \vartheta(R(x_i, u), 0), & x_i \in U_k, \end{cases}$$

where  $a \wedge b$  is the minimum of  $a$  and  $b$ .

**Proof:** Since  $\lambda_T(x_i) = \inf_{u \in T, d(x_i) \neq d(u)} \vartheta(R(x_i, u), 0)$  holds for  $(T, R \cup D)$ , for  $\forall x_i \in T$  we have

$$\begin{aligned} \lambda(x_i) &= \inf_{u \notin [x_i]_D} \vartheta(R(x_i, u), 0) \\ &= \inf_{u \in T, d(u) \neq d(x_i)} \vartheta(R(x_i, u), 0) \wedge \\ &\quad \inf_{u \in U_k, d(u) \neq d(x_i)} \vartheta(R(x_i, u), 0) \\ &= \lambda_T(x_i) \wedge \inf_{u \in U_k, d(x_i) \neq d(u)} \vartheta(R(x_i, u), 0). \end{aligned}$$

Similarly,  $\lambda(x_i) = \inf_{u \in U_k, d(u) \neq d(x_i)} \vartheta(R(x_i, u), 0)$  holds for  $(U_k, R \cup D)$ . Thus, for  $\forall x_i \in U_k$ , we have

$$\begin{aligned} \lambda(x_i) &= \inf_{u \notin [x_i]_D} \vartheta(R(x_i, u), 0) \\ &= \inf_{u \in T, d(u) \neq d(x_i)} \vartheta(R(x_i, u), 0) \wedge \\ &\quad \inf_{u \in U_k, d(u) \neq d(x_i)} \vartheta(R(x_i, u), 0) \\ &= \lambda_k(x_i) \wedge \inf_{u \in T, d(x_i) \neq d(u)} \vartheta(R(x_i, u), 0). \end{aligned}$$

Hence, we prove this theorem.  $\square$

Theorem 5 implies  $\lambda(x_i) \leq \lambda_T(x_i)$  holds for  $\forall x_i \in T$ , and  $\lambda(x_i) \leq \lambda_k(x_i)$  holds for  $\forall x_i \in U_k$ . According to Theorem 5, in order to incrementally compute  $\lambda(x_i)$  for  $x_i \in T \cup U_k$ , we only need to compute  $\inf_{u \in T, d(x_i) \neq d(u)} \vartheta(R(x_i, u), 0)$  for  $x_i \in U_k$  and  $\inf_{u \in U_k, d(x_i) \neq d(u)} \vartheta(R(x_i, u), 0)$  for  $x_i \in T$ .

In what follows, we incrementally compute the relative discernibility relations of each feature and the feature set in  $(T \cup U_k, R \cup D)$ . The following theorem is given to show the relationship among  $DIS(a)$ ,  $DIS_k(a)$  and  $DIS_T(a)$ .

**Theorem 6.** For  $\forall a \in R$ , we have  $DIS_T(a) \cup DIS_k(a) \subseteq DIS(a)$ .

**Proof:**  $DIS_T(a) \cup DIS_k(a) \subseteq DIS(a)$  holds for  $\forall a \in R$ . For  $\forall x_i \in T$ , we have  $\lambda(x_i) \leq \lambda_T(x_i)$ . Thus, by the monotonicity of  $T$ -norm,  $T(a(x_i, x_j), \lambda(x_i)) = 0$  holds for  $(T \cup U_k, R \cup D)$ , which implies  $(x_i, x_j) \in DIS(a)$ , i.e.,  $DIS_T(a) \subseteq DIS(a)$ . In a similar way, for  $\forall (x_i, x_j) \in DIS_k(a)$ , we have  $T(a(x_i, x_j), \lambda_k(x_i)) = 0$ , which implies  $T(a(x_i, x_j), \lambda(x_i)) = 0$  since  $\lambda(x_i) \leq \lambda_k(x_i)$  holds for  $\forall x_i \in U_k$ . Thus, we have  $(x_i, x_j) \in DIS(a)$ , which implies  $DIS_k(a) \subseteq DIS(a)$ . Therefore, we can get  $DIS_T(a) \cup DIS_k(a) \subseteq DIS(a)$  for  $\forall a \in R$ .  $\square$

By Theorem 6, for  $\forall a \in R$ , both  $DIS_T(a)$  and  $DIS_k(a)$  are the subsets of  $DIS(a)$ . The following theorem incrementally computes the new sample pairs in  $DIS(a)$  for  $\forall a \in R$ .

**Theorem 7.** For  $\forall a \in R$ , the following statements hold:

- (1) for  $x_i, x_j \in T$  and  $d(x_i) \neq d(x_j)$ , if  $T(a(x_i, x_j), \lambda(x_i)) = 0$ , then  $(x_i, x_j) \in DIS(a)$ ;
- (2) for  $x_i, x_j \in U_k$  and  $d(x_i) \neq d(x_j)$ , if  $T(a(x_i, x_j), \lambda(x_i)) = 0$ , then  $(x_i, x_j) \in DIS(a)$ ;
- (3) for  $x_i \in T, x_j \in U_k$ , and  $d(x_i) \neq d(x_j)$ , if  $T(a(x_i, x_j), \lambda(x_i)) = 0$ , then  $(x_i, x_j) \in DIS(a)$ ; if  $T(a(x_j, x_i), \lambda(x_j)) = 0$ , then  $(x_j, x_i) \in DIS(a)$ .

**Proof:** By Definition 2, we can easily prove this theorem.  $\square$

By Theorem 7, we design Algorithm 2 to update the relative discernibility relations of each feature and the feature set.

Algorithm 2 is mainly made up of two parts: (1) updating  $\lambda(x_i)$  for  $\forall x_i \in T \cup U_k$ ; (2) updating  $DIS(a)$  for  $\forall a \in R$ , and  $DIS(R)$ . The time complexity of part (1) is  $O(|T||U_k||R|)$ , and that of part (2) is  $O((|T|^2 - |DIS_T(a)|)|R|)$ . Therefore, the time complexity of Algorithm 2 is  $\max(O(|T||U_k||R|), O((|T|^2 - |DIS_T(a)|)|R|))$ .

### C. Incremental process of fuzzy rough set based feature selection

When a sample subset  $U_k$  enters into the temporary pool  $T$ , the current reduct  $red_T$  either satisfies  $DIS(R) = DIS(red_T)$ , or not. This is, there are two cases: 1)  $DIS(R) = DIS(red_T)$ ; 2)  $DIS(R) \neq DIS(red_T)$ . For the two cases, we study the incremental process of feature selection by developing the strategies of adding and deleting features.

**Case 1:**  $DIS(R) = DIS(red_T)$ .

**Theorem 8.**  $DIS(R) = DIS(red_T)$  implies that  $red_T$  contains a reduct of  $(T \cup U_k, R \cup D)$ .

### Algorithm 2 updating the relative discernibility relation

**Input:** 1) A current sample set  $T$ ; 2)  $\lambda_T(x_i)$  for each  $x_i \in T$ ; 3)  $DIS_T(a)$  for each  $a \in R$ , and  $DIS_T(R)$ ; 4) An incoming sample subset  $U_k$ .  
**Output:**  $DIS(a)$  for  $a \in R$ , and  $DIS(R)$ .  
1: According to Definition 2, compute  $DIS_k(a)$  for  $\forall a \in R$ , and  $DIS_k(R)$  in  $(U_k, R \cup D)$ ;  
2: By Theorem 6, compute  $\lambda(x_i)$  for each  $x_i \in T \cup U_k$ ;  
3: Let  $DIS(R) = DIS_T(R) \cup DIS_k(R)$ ;  
4: **for** each  $a \in R$  **do**  
5:   Let  $DIS(a) = DIS_T(a) \cup DIS_k(a)$ ;  
6:   For each  $(x_i, x_j) \notin DIS_T(a)$  satisfying  $\forall x_i, x_j \in T$  and  $d(x_i) \neq d(x_j)$ ,  
     if  $T(a(x_i, x_j), \lambda(x_i)) = 0$ , then let  $DIS(a) = DIS(a) \cup (x_i, x_j)$  and  $DIS(R) = DIS(R) \cup (x_i, x_j)$ ;  
7:   For each  $(x_i, x_j) \notin DIS_k(a)$  satisfying  $\forall x_i, x_j \in U_k$  and  $d(x_i) \neq d(x_j)$ ,  
     if  $T(a(x_i, x_j), \lambda(x_i)) = 0$ , then let  $DIS(a) = DIS(a) \cup (x_i, x_j)$  and  $DIS(R) = DIS(R) \cup (x_i, x_j)$ ;  
8:   For  $x_i \in T, x_j \in U_k$ , and  $d(x_i) \neq d(x_j)$ ,  
     if  $T(a(x_i, x_j), \lambda(x_i)) = 0$ , then let  $DIS(a) = DIS(a) \cup (x_i, x_j)$  and  $DIS(R) = DIS(R) \cup (x_i, x_j)$ ;  
     if  $T(a(x_j, x_i), \lambda(x_j)) = 0$ , then let  $DIS(a) = DIS(a) \cup (x_j, x_i)$  and  $DIS(R) = DIS(R) \cup (x_j, x_i)$ ;  
9: **end for**  
10: **return**  $DIS(a)$  for each  $a \in R$ , and  $DIS(R)$ .

**Proof:**  $DIS(R) = DIS(red_T)$  indicates any sample pair that can be discerned by  $R$ , can also be discerned by  $red_T$ . By Theorem 4,  $red_T$  contains a reduct of  $(T \cup U_k, R \cup D)$ .

According to Theorem 8,  $red_T$  is either a reduct of the updated temporary decision table  $(T \cup U_k, R \cup D)$ , or it properly contains a reduct of  $(T \cup U_k, R \cup D)$ . To compute a reduct of  $(T \cup U_k, R \cup D)$ , we develop the following strategy.

**First Strategy of Feature Deletion:** Feature  $a \in red_T$  can be deleted from  $red_T$  if  $DIS(red_T - \{a\}) = DIS(R)$ .

The First Strategy of Feature Deletion indicates that  $red_T - \{a\}$  can still discern all sample pairs that are discerned by  $R$  in the updated temporary decision table, so that the feature  $a \in red_T$  can be deleted from  $red_T$ . If the strategy does not hold for  $\forall a \in red_T$ , then by Theorem 4,  $red_T$  is also a reduct of  $(T \cup U_k, R \cup D)$ . Otherwise, if the strategy holds for  $\exists a \in red_T$ , then any sample pair that is discerned by  $R$  can also be discerned by  $red_T - \{a\}$ , which implies that  $a$  can be deleted from  $red_T$ . We can continue the strategy of deleting features until the strategy does not hold. Thus, we can obtain a reduct of the updated temporary decision table.

**Case 2:**  $DIS(R) \neq DIS(red_T)$ .

Case 2 implies  $red_T$  is not a reduct of the updated temporary decision table, since it does not satisfy the condition (1) of Theorem 4. Thus, we need to add some features  $B \subseteq R - red_T$  into  $red_T$  until  $DIS(R) = DIS(red_T \cup B)$ . By Theorem 4, we develop the following strategy of adding features.

**Strategy of Feature Addition:** Feature subset  $B \in R - red_T$  can be added into  $red_T$  if  $B$  is a minimal addition subset satisfying  $DIS(red_T \cup B) = DIS(R)$ .

By Strategy of Feature Addition,  $red_T \cup B$  can discern all sample pairs that are discerned by  $R$ . This fact implies  $red_T \cup B$  contains a reduct of  $(T \cup U_k, R \cup D)$ . That is, there may be redundant features in  $red_T \cup B$ . The following strategy is

developed to obtain a reduct of  $(T \cup U_k, R \cup D)$ .

**Second Strategy of Feature Deletion:** Feature  $a$  can be deleted from  $red_T \cup B$  if  $DIS((red_T \cup B) - \{a\}) = DIS(R)$ .

If the strategy of deleting features does not hold for  $\forall a \in red_T \cup B$ , then  $red_T \cup B$  is a reduct of the updated temporary decision table by Theorem 4. If the strategy holds for  $\exists a \in red_T \cup B$ , then  $a$  should be deleted from  $red_T \cup B$  by Theorem 4. By continuing Second Strategy of Feature Deletion, we can obtain a reduct of the updated temporary decision table.

To be brief, if an incoming subset is in Case 1, we apply First Strategy of Feature Deletion to obtain a reduct of the updated temporary decision table; if an incoming subset is in Case 2, we can first apply Strategy of Feature Addition to add the feature set  $B \in R - red_T$ , and then use Second Strategy of Feature Deletion to delete redundant features from  $red_T \cup B$ .

**Remark 1.** Removing redundant features is the key task for selecting an optimal feature subset [62]. Due to the measurement error, the complete removal of redundancy is not good. Hence, it is suggested that a useful principle is needed to control the level of redundancy in the process of selecting features. In fact, there may be more than one optimal feature subset on a data set. In the framework of fuzzy rough sets, the redundancy is related to a selected feature subset [63]. That is, a feature is redundant related to an optimal feature subset, but not redundant related to other optimal feature subsets. In the proposed methods, a feature  $a$  is said to be *redundant* related to a feature subset  $P$ , if  $DIS(P) = DIS(R)$  and  $DIS(P) = DIS(P \cup \{a\})$ . The definition of redundancy implies that the sample pairs discerned by the redundant feature can always be discerned by an optimal feature subset. Therefore, our proposed methods can control the level of redundancy, and remove the redundant features related to a selected feature subset. Features can be categorized into essential feature, derogatory feature, indifferent feature and redundant feature. In the framework of fuzzy rough set, the essential feature naturally belongs to the core which is obtained according to Theorem 3. Our proposed methods can discard derogatory feature by judging whether sample pairs discerned by it can be discerned by any feature subset. Indifferent feature can be discarded since it does not provide the discernibility information about sample pairs in the proposed framework.

### D. Incremental perspective for fuzzy rough set based feature selection

This subsection investigates fuzzy rough set based feature selection in the incremental environment. Two incremental versions of fuzzy rough set based feature selection are designed by judging whether to compute a reduct with sample subsets arriving sequentially. In terms of the two incremental versions, we present two corresponding algorithms to incrementally select a feature subset from a dataset.

**Version 1:** Perform feature selection with each sample subset arriving.

In this version, we update the selected feature subset each time a sample subset arrives. That is, with the arrival of each sample subset, the reduct of a temporary decision table is updated based on the incremental computation of the relative



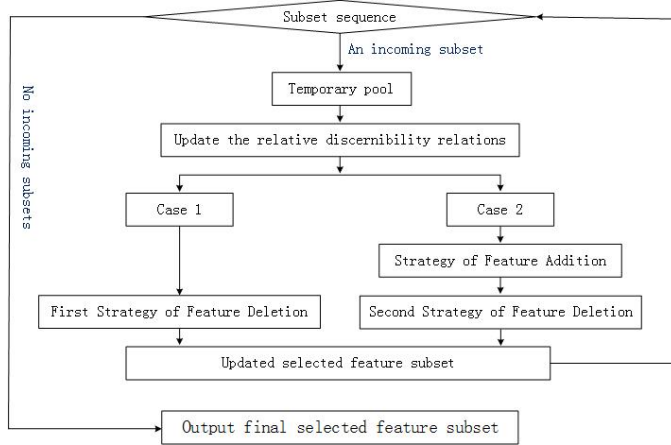


Fig. 1: First incremental version of fuzzy rough set based feature selection.

discernibility relations. If it is Case 1, we perform First Strategy of Feature deletion; if it is Case 2, we perform Strategy of Feature Addition and then Second Strategy of Feature Deletion. This process is repeated until there is no incoming subset left, resulting in a final reduct from the whole data set. The flow chart of Version 1 is shown in Fig. 1.

By incremental version, we propose the following incremental algorithm for fuzzy rough set based feature selection.

**Algorithm 3** First incremental version for fuzzy rough set based feature selection (IV-FS-FRS-1)

**Input:** 1) The sample subset sequence:  $U = \{U_k\}_{k=1}^m$ ; 2) The feature set:  $R$ ; 3) The decision set:  $D$ ;

**Output:**

- A reduct of  $(U, R \cup D)$ :  $red$ ;
- 1: Initialize: 1)  $red = \emptyset$ ; 2) The pool to store the previously incoming samples  $T = \emptyset$ ; 3)  $DIS_T(a) = \emptyset$  for each  $a \in R$ , and  $DIS_T(R) = \emptyset$ ; 4) Iterations  $k = 1$ ;
  - 2: **while**  $U$  is not empty **do**
  - 3: Observe a sample subset  $U_k$  from  $U$ , and add it into  $T$ ;
  - 4: According to Algorithm 2, compute  $DIS(a)$  for each  $a \in R$  and  $DIS(R)$  in  $(T \cup U_k, R \cup D)$ ;
  - 5: Let  $DIS_T(a) = DIS(a)$  for each  $a \in R$ , and  $DIS_T(R) = DIS(R)$ ;
  - 6: **while**  $DIS_T(R) \neq DIS_T(red)$  **do**
  - 7: For each  $a \in R - red$ , compute  $DIS_T(red \cup \{a\})$ ;
  - 8: Select the feature  $a_0 \in R - red$  satisfying
 
$$|DIS_T(red \cup \{a_0\})| = \max_{a \in R - red} |DIS_T(red) \cup DIS_T(a)|;$$
  - 9: Let  $red = red \cup \{a_0\}$ , and  $DIS_T(red) = DIS_T(red) \cup DIS_T(a_0)$ ;
  - 10: **end while**
  - 11: **while**  $DIS_T(R) = DIS_T(red)$  **do**
  - 12: For each  $a \in red$ , compute  $DIS_T(red - \{a\})$ ;
  - 13: Select  $a_0 \in red$  satisfying  $DIS_T(R) = DIS_T(red - \{a_0\})$ , and let  $red = red - \{a_0\}$ ;
  - 14: **end while**
  - 15: Let  $U = U - U_k$ ,  $T = T \cup U_k$ ,  $k = k + 1$ ;
  - 16: **end while**
  - 17: **return**  $red$ .

Algorithm 3 computes a reduct starting from an empty temporary pool. Step 1 initializes  $T$  and these results from

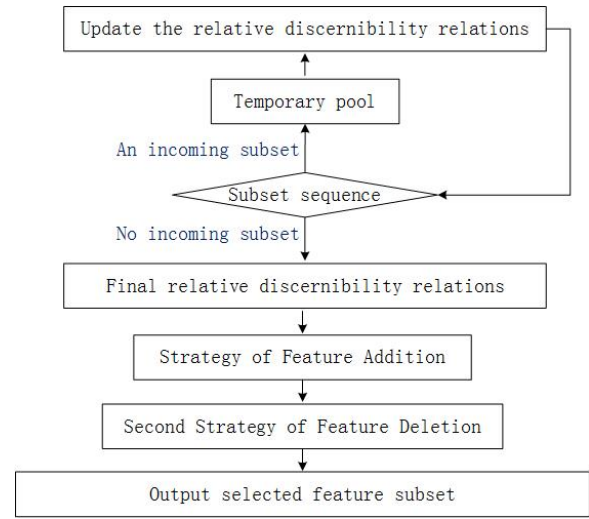


Fig. 2: Second incremental version of fuzzy rough set based feature selection.

$(T, R \cup D)$  as empty sets. Step 3 selects a sample subset that will be added into  $T$ . Step 4 incrementally computes the relative discernibility relations of each feature and the feature set in the updated temporary decision table, with a time complexity of  $\max(O(|T||U_k||R|), O((|T|^2 - |DIS_T(a)|)|R|))$ . Step 6 decides whether it is Case 1 or Case 2, with the time complexity of  $O((|T \cup U_k|)^2|R|)$ . Steps 6~10 perform the strategies of adding features, with a time complexity of  $O(|R|)$ . Steps 11~14 perform the strategies of deleting features, with a time complexity of  $O(|R|)$ . Hence, the time complexity of Algorithm 3 is  $\max(O(|T||U_k||R|), O((|T|^2 - |DIS_T(a)|)|R|))$ .

At each iteration, however, Version 1 updates a selected feature subset, which is often time-consuming. To accelerate Version 1, the feature subset is not updated each time a sample subset comes, yielding the following incremental version.

**Version 2:** Perform feature selection when there is no further sample subset arriving.

This version begins with an empty set to compute the selected features from the whole data set when no incoming subset is left. Upon the arrival of each subset, we only update the relative discernibility relations of each feature and the feature set. When there is no incoming subset, we obtain the final relative discernibility relations of each feature and the feature set on the whole data set. Based on the final relations, we utilize Strategy of Feature Addition and Second Strategy of Feature Deletion to compute a final reduct of the fuzzy decision table. The flow chart is shown in Fig. 2.

The following algorithm is formulated to compute a reduct from a data set based on Version 2.

In Algorithm 4, Step 1 initializes  $T$  and these results from  $(T, R \cup D)$  as empty sets. Steps 2~4 updates the relative discernibility relations of each feature and the feature set, with the time complexity of  $\max(O(|T||U_k||R|), O((|T|^2 - |DIS_T(a)|)|R|))$ . Steps 8~12 perform Strategy of Feature Addition, with the time complexity of  $O(|R|)$ . Steps 13~16 perform Second Strategy of Feature Deletion, with a time complexity of  $O(|R|)$ . Hence, the time complexity of Algorithm

**Algorithm 4** Second incremental version for fuzzy rough set based feature selection (IV-FS-FRS-2)

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**Input:** 1) The sample set sequence  $U = \{U_k\}_{k=1}^m$ ; 2) The feature set  $R$ ; 3) The decision set  $D$ ;

**Output:** A reduct of  $(U, R \cup D)$ ; *red*;

1: Initialize: 1)  $red = \emptyset$ ; 2) The temporary pool to store the previously incoming samples  $T = \emptyset$ ; 3)  $DIS_T(a) = \emptyset$  for each  $a \in R$ , and  $DIS(R) = \emptyset$ ; 4) Iterations  $k = 1$ ;

2: **while**  $U$  is not empty **do**

3:   Observe a sample subset  $U_k$  from  $U$ , and add it into  $T$ ;

4:   By Algorithm 2, compute  $DIS(a)$  for each  $a \in R$  and  $DIS(R)$  in  $(T \cup U_k, R \cup D)$ ;

5:   Let  $DIS_T(a) = DIS(a)$  for each  $a \in R$ , and  $DIS_T(R) = DIS(R)$ ;

6:   Let  $U = U - U_k$ ,  $T = T \cup U_k$ , and  $k = k + 1$ ;

7: **end while**

8: **while**  $DIS_T(R) \neq DIS_T(red)$  **do**

9:   For each  $a \in R - red$ , compute  $DIS_T(red \cup \{a\})$ ;

10:   Select the feature  $a_0 \in R - red$  satisfying

$$|DIS_T(red \cup \{a_0\})| = \max_{a \in R - red} |DIS_T(red) \cup DIS_T(a)|;$$

11:   Let  $red = red \cup \{a_0\}$ , and  $DIS_T(red) = DIS_T(red) \cup DIS_T(a_0)$ ;

12: **end while**

13: **while**  $DIS_T(R) = DIS_T(red)$  **do**

14:   For each  $a \in red$ , compute  $DIS_T(red - \{a\})$ ;

15:   Select  $a_0 \in red$  satisfying  $DIS_T(R) = DIS_T(red - \{a_0\})$ , and let  $red = red - \{a_0\}$ ;

16: **end while**

17: **return**  $red$ .

---

4 is  $\max(O(|T||U_k||R|), O((|T|^2 - |DIS_T(a)|)|R|))$ .

*Remark 2.* Two proposed incremental algorithms expedite fuzzy rough set based feature selection, which will be demonstrated in the next section. However, there are different operation processes between them. Upon the arrival of a sample subset, Version 1 updates the selected feature subset, while Version 2 only performs feature selection where there is no further sample subset. Obviously, Version 2 saves some runtime without updating the feature subset each time a sample subset arrives, which can be shown in our experimental comparisons. In fact, Version 1 is more applicable to dynamic data sets with sample arriving, since it can find a real-time feature subset. Unlike Version 1, Version 2 is more suitable to large data sets that can be presented in sample subsets to be added sequentially, with selecting the feature subset where there is no further sample subset arriving.

*Remark 3.* It is a good idea to introduce the true sliding window into the incremental operation of fuzzy rough set based feature selection, in which we can use the proposed strategies of adding and deleting features to update the selected feature subset within a window. However, a temporally localised reduct that is often different from a real reduct of the data set, is obtained based on samples within this current window. The quality of the temporary reduct is expected to be low. This implies that the choice of the window size is not arbitrary. It usually depends on the domain in question and the samples of all data streams, which is clearly non-trivial. Once the window size  $n_w$  is determined, the sliding

window operation commences so that at most  $n_w$  samples are visible to the incremental computation of feature selection. During the sliding window, however, it is problematic in determining which outdated samples are filtered out and which future samples are received. From this perspective, it is time-consuming in performing the sliding window operation, since one has to consider the relation between each sample and all samples of the whole data set in the framework of fuzzy rough sets. Therefore, to solve the above shortcomings, we will study the combination of the incremental operation and the sliding window in the future work.

## VI. EXPERIMENTAL EVALUATION

In this section, we experimentally evaluate the performance of our proposed incremental algorithms for fuzzy rough set based feature selection on several UCI data sets. Four batch algorithms are selected as baseline algorithms for comparisons with IV-FS-FRS-2 to show the effectiveness of the proposed incremental version. They are FS-FRS (Algorithm 1 in this paper), the discernibility matrix based algorithm [55] (denoted by Matrix), the dependency function based algorithm [58] (denoted by Dependency), as well as fuzzy entropy based algorithm [61] (denoted by Entropy) which is actually stochastic. The efficiency of IV-FS-FRS-2 is further demonstrated via comparisons with IV-FS-FRS-1 (Algorithm 3 in this paper) and neighbour rough set based incremental algorithm [60] (denoted by INFS) that incrementally selects a feature subset from a real-valued data set with samples arriving one by one.

### A. Experimental design

*The hardware environment:* Intel (R) Xeon (R) CPU X5690 @3.47GHz 3.46GHz (2 processors), and 64.0GB.

*The software environment:* Matlab 2012b.

*Data set:* Ten real-valued data sets from UCI Machine Learning Repository are used (see Table I) in our experimental comparisons.

**TABLE I**  
DESCRIPTION OF THE DATA SETS

Dataset	Abbreviation	Samples	Feature	Class
Sonar	Sonar	208	60	2
Spect	Spect	267	44	2
Iono	Iono	351	34	2
Libras movement	Libras	360	90	15
WDBC	WDBC	569	30	2
QSAR biodegradation	QSAR	1055	41	2
Parkinsons multiple	Park	1208	28	2
Waveform	Wave	5000	21	3
Thyroid	Thyroid	9172	28	50
Gamma	Gamma	19020	10	2

*Data split:* To perform our proposed IV-FS-FRS-1 and IV-FS-FRS-2, each data set in Table I is randomly divided into 10 sample subsets with equal size. So, these subsets are made up of a sample subset sequence.

*Classifier:* K-nearest neighbor classifier (K is set as 3) is used to test the classification accuracy of features selected by several comparison algorithms. 10-fold cross validation is applied to the ten data sets.

*Fuzziness of the real-valued data set:* For a real-valued feature  $a$ , the feature value of each sample is normalized as

**TABLE II**

**RUNTIME (S) OF IV-FS-FRS-2 AND FOUR BATCH ALGORITHMS**

Dataset	IV-FS-FRS-2	FS-FRS	Matrix	Dependency	Entropy
Sonar	3.08	66.40	15.42	682.08	8.47
Spect	2.01	75.58	21.22	480.70	11.03
Iono	2.07	77.71	27.42	515.49	14.03
Libras	15.35	439.56	216.95	743.32	20.59
WDBC	7.12	285.36	73.97	120.14	37.53
QSAR	28.23	136.41	516.37	787.97	311.16
Park	21.67	91.06	467.23	336.44	311.70
Wave	199.88	6233.82	3121.04	4365.85	5779.02
Thyroid	15705.43	66795.98	43878.87	44923.65	83400.09
Gamma	19174.40	*	*	*	*

**TABLE III**

**SIZE OF FEATURES SELECTED BY IV-FS-FRS-2 AND FOUR BATCH ALGORITHMS**

Dataset	Raw	IV-FS-FRS-2	FS-FRS	Matrix	Dependency	Entropy
Sonar	60	20	57	57	52	19
Spect	44	31	44	44	38	30
Iono	34	27	28	29	30	25
Libras	90	51	72	72	47	52
WDBC	30	24	30	30	25	24
QSAR	41	34	40	35	33	34
Park	28	24	27	27	17	24
Wave	21	17	19	18	17	21
Thyroid	28	5	17	27	28	17
Gamma	10	5	*	*	*	*
<b>Average</b>	38.6	<b>23.8</b>	37.11	37.67	31.89	27.33

$\bar{a}(x_i) = \frac{a(x_i) - \min_j a(x_j)}{\max_j a(x_j) - \min_j a(x_j)}, x_i \in U$ . Thus,  $\bar{a}(x_i) \in [0, 1]$  for  $\forall x_i \in U$ . A fuzzy similarity relation for  $\bar{a}$  is defined as  $\bar{a}(x_i, x_j) = 1 - |\bar{a}(x_i) - \bar{a}(x_j)|$  for  $x_i, x_j \in U$ .

*Triangular norm:*  $T_L$  is used in our experiments.

### B. Comparisons of IV-FS-FRS-2 and four batch algorithms

This section evaluates the effectiveness of IV-FS-FRS-2 on ten data sets in terms of the following aspects. One is to compare the runtime of IV-FS-FRS-2 and four batch algorithms. The other is to compare the size and the accuracy of the features selected by IV-FS-FRS-2, FS-FRS, Matrix, Dependency and Entropy. The experimental results are summarized in Table II, Table III and Table IV, where the symbol '\*' means this method cannot select a feature subset from the data set in the current software and hardware environments.

Table II shows that in comparison with the four batch algorithms, IV-FS-FRS-2 greatly reduces the runtime of selecting features from each selected dataset. For example, the runtime of IV-FS-FRS-2 shows a decrease up to 3.49%, 7.08%, 2.07%, 74.55% of that FS-FRS, Matrix, Dependency and Entropy on 'Libras', respectively; the runtime of IV-FS-FRS-2 decreases to 20.69%, 5.47%, 3.58%, 9.07% of that of FS-FRS, Matrix, Dependency and Entropy on 'QSAR', respectively. Moreover, we can see from Table 2 that on 'Gamma', FS-FRS, Matrix, Dependency and Entropy cannot obtain a selected feature subset, but IV-FS-FRS-2 can compute a feature subset under the current software and hardware environments. This fact implies that it is possible to employ IV-FS-FRS-2 to obtain a selected feature subset from large-scale data sets. Therefore, IV-FS-FRS-2 can not only expedite feature selection based on fuzzy rough sets, but also deal with large-scale data sets.

**TABLE IV**

**CLASSIFICATION ACCURACY OF FEATURES SELECTED BY IV-FS-FRS-2 AND FOUR BATCH ALGORITHMS**

Dataset	Raw	IV-FS-FRS-2	FS-FRS	Matrix	Dependency	Entropy
Sonar	0.8612	0.7983	0.8364	0.8417	0.8324	0.7976
Spect	0.7120	0.7376	0.7148	0.7303	0.7151	0.7150
Iono	0.6379	0.8545	0.8574	0.8660	0.8547	0.6406
Libras	0.7944	0.7639	0.7722	0.7806	0.7806	0.7611
WDBC	0.9596	0.9666	0.9684	0.9737	0.9701	0.9649
QSAR	0.8455	0.8427	0.8371	0.8388	0.8379	0.8417
Park	0.9835	0.9859	0.9851	0.9843	0.9876	0.9653
Wave	0.7960	0.7972	0.8008	0.7614	0.7738	0.7946
Thyroid	0.8210	0.8209	0.7606	0.8201	0.8204	0.7813
Gamma	0.8302	0.7985	*	*	*	*
<b>Advantages</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>

Table III shows that the average size of features obtained by IV-FS-FRS-2 (23.8) is less than that of feature subsets selected by 'Raw' (38.6), FS-FRS (37.11), Matrix (37.67), Dependency (31.89) and Entropy (27.33). The reason is that IV-FS-FRS-2 has the step of removing redundant features. Furthermore, Table IV shows the accuracy of features selected by IV-FS-FRS-2, FS-FRS, Matrix, Dependency and Entropy, where 'Raw' represents the accuracy of all features and 'Advantages' is the number of times that the accuracy of a method is superior to 'Raw' on the ten datasets. From Table IV, we can see that the accuracy of IV-FS-FRS-2 is higher than 'Raw' on 5 selected datasets; the accuracy of FS-FRS is better than 'Raw' on 5 datasets; both Matrix and Dependency have advantages over 'Raw' on 4 datasets; and Entropy outperforms 'Raw' on 3 datasets. These facts indicate that IV-FS-FRS-2 and FS-FRS can improve the accuracy of 'Raw', with ignoring the fact that Matrix and Dependency is better than IV-FS-FRS-2 and FS-FRS on 'Iono', 'WDBC' and 'Park'. Furthermore, on 'Sonar', 'Libras', 'QSAR' and 'Thyroid', all of several comparisons algorithms are close to 'Raw', where IV-FS-FRS-2 and FS-FRS are superior to Matrix, Dependency and Entropy on 'QSAR' and 'Thyroid'. Hence, we can draw the conclusion from the above facts that our proposed methods can improve the accuracy of 'Raw' on most of the selected datasets.

### C. Comparison of IV-FS-FRS-2, IV-FS-FRS-1 and INFS

In this section, IV-FS-FRS-2 is compared with IV-FS-FRS-1 and INFS on the ten datasets. These comparisons focus on the runtime, the size and accuracy of the selected features, as well as the discussion that is suggested to show how the sample subset sequence size has an influence on the overall efficacy of the proposed incremental algorithms. The experimental results are summarized in Table V, Fig. 3, Fig. 4 and Fig. 5.

Table V shows IV-FS-FRS-2 is more efficient than IV-FS-FRS-1, and IV-FS-FRS-1 is more efficient than INFS on the ten datasets. There may be the following reasons. The first one is with each subset arriving, IV-FS-FRS-2 only updates the relative discernibility relations without performing feature selection, while IV-FS-FRS-1 updates the selected feature subset by updating the relative discernibility relations. The second one is upon the arrival of a sample subset, our proposed incremental algorithms can handle it all at once, while INFS needs to deal with them one at a time. The third one is our proposed incremental algorithms are designed based on the strategies of adding and deleting features, whereas INFS has no investigations for how to add and delete features. Hence, in comparisons with INFS, our proposed incremental algorithms can save the runtime of obtaining a feature subset from a real-

**TABLE V**  
EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS OF IV-FS-FRS-1, IV-FS-FRS-2 AND INFS

Dataset	IV-FS-FRS-1			IV-FS-FRS-2			INFS		
	Runtime/s	No.	Accuracy	Runtime/s	No.	Accuracy	Runtime/s	No.	Accuracy
Sonar	8.56	8	0.7881	3.08	20	0.7983	14.85	4	0.76
Spect	5.31	14	0.7600	2.01	31	0.7376	30.50	5	0.7372
Iono	4.57	13	0.8690	2.07	27	0.8545	13.58	30	0.6123
Libras	44.64	35	0.7722	15.35	51	0.7639	64.44	5	0.6556
WDBC	9.48	15	0.9526	7.12	24	0.9666	83.35	4	0.9438
QSAR	39.30	12	0.7764	28.23	34	0.8427	137.30	12	0.8408
Park	31.25	9	0.6598	21.67	24	0.9859	813.37	4	0.9301
Wave	1930.77	3	0.5482	199.88	17	0.7972	67861.76	7	0.6810
Thyroid	29291.57	4	0.8205	15705.43	5	0.8209	84539.64	23	0.8132
Gamma	38238.69	6	0.8315	19174.40	5	0.7985	65438.97	10	0.8364

valued dataset, and IV-FS-FRS-2 is much faster than IV-FS-FRS-1 and INFS.

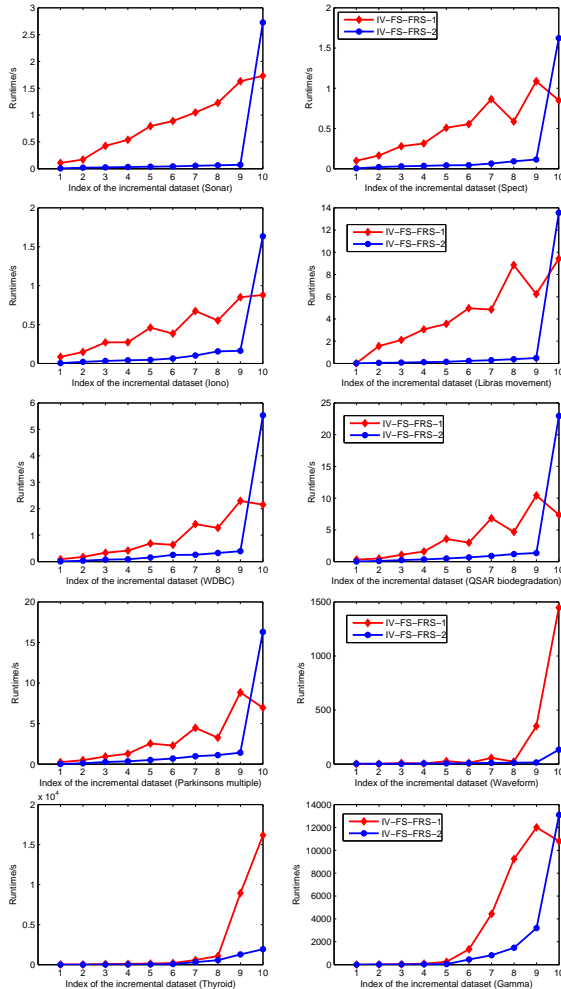


Fig. 3: Runtime of IV-FS-FRS-1 and IV-FS-FRS-2 with respect to subsets continuously arriving.

Moreover, Table V shows different sizes of features selected by three incremental algorithms, since with a sample subset arriving IV-FS-FRS-1 and INFS updates the selected feature subset while IV-FS-FRS-2 performs feature selection where no subset is left. On most of the selected datasets, the accuracy

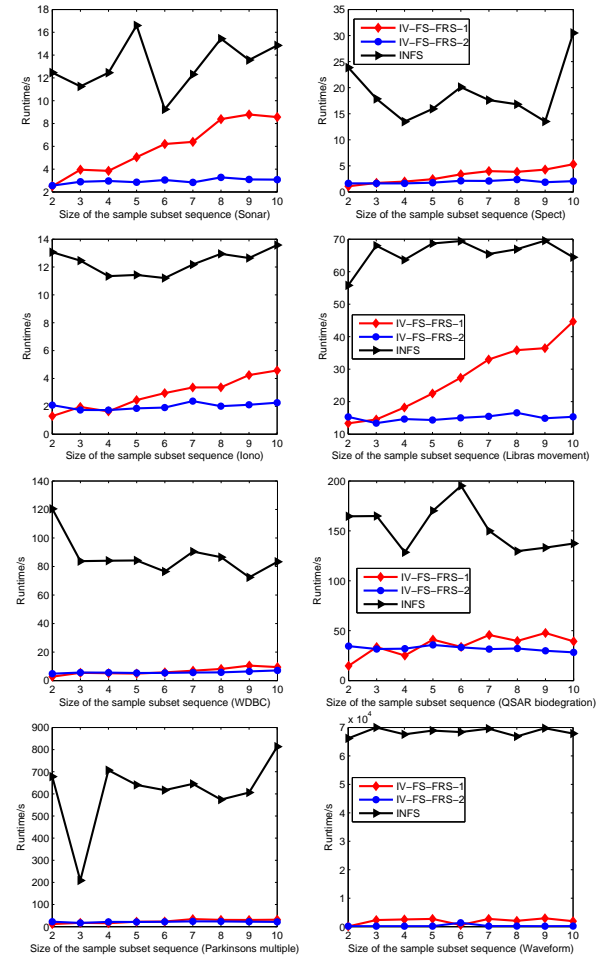


Fig. 4: Runtime of IV-FS-FRS-1, IV-FS-FRS-2 and INFS as the size of the sample subset sequence changes.

of our proposed incremental algorithms is higher than that of INFS. Therefore, IV-FS-FRS-2 can find a comparable feature subset from a real-valued dataset in a much shorter time.

Fig. 3 depicts the detailed changes of the runtime of IV-FS-FRS-1 and IV-FS-FRS-2 with subsets continuously arriving. Fig. 3 shows IV-FS-FRS-2 is faster than IV-FS-FRS-1 with the first nine subsets arriving. The reason is with the arrival of the first nine subsets, IV-FS-FRS-1 updates selected features based

on the incremental computation of the relative discernibility relations, whereas IV-FS-FRS-2 only incrementally computes the relative discernibility relations without performing feature selection. Thereby, IV-FS-FRS-2 saves the runtime with the first nine subsets arriving. Furthermore, we can also observe that compared with IV-FS-FRS-1, IV-FS-FRS-2 consumes more runtime with the arrival of the final subset of each dataset, since IV-FS-FRS-2 performs feature selection starting with an empty set while IV-FS-FRS-1 updates the selected features based on a current feature subset.

To show the influence of the sequence size on the efficacy of our incremental algorithms, each dataset is randomly divided into 2 parts,  $\dots$ , 10 parts with equal size. The results are depicted in Fig. 4 and Fig. 5, where x-axis is the sequence size. Fig. 4 displays IV-FS-FRS-1 and IV-FS-FRS-2 are consistently much faster than INFS with changing the sequence size on each dataset. There may be the following reasons. One is with a sample subset arriving, our proposed incremental algorithms can handle them all at once, while INFS has to be run for many times. The other is our proposed incremental algorithms are designed by the strategies of adding and deleting features, whereas INFS has no investigation for how to add and delete features. Furthermore, Fig. 4 indicates that the runtime of IV-FS-FRS-1 and IV-FS-FRS-2 basically increases with increasing the sequence size. From Fig. 4, we can also conclude that our proposed algorithms are more efficient than INFS when the sequence size ranges from 2 to 4.

Fig. 5 shows the number and accuracy of features selected by IV-FS-FRS-1, IV-FS-FRS-2 and INFS as the sequence size changes from 2 to 10. Fig. 5 indicates the number of features selected by IV-FS-FRS-2 and INFS is basically stable with changing the sequence size, while the number of features selected by IV-FS-FRS-1 fluctuates significantly. Moreover, the accuracy of features selected by IV-FS-FRS-2 and INFS changes a little, whereas the accuracy of IV-FS-FRS-1 fluctuates significantly. The accuracy of IV-FS-FRS-2 outperforms that of 'Raw' on 6 datasets. These facts demonstrate the efficiency and stability of IV-FS-FRS-2.

## VII. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

To expedite feature selection from large datasets, we study the incremental approach to fuzzy rough set based feature selection assuming a dataset can be divided into some sample subsets to be presented sequentially. By an insight into the incremental change of feature subset as sample subsets are presented and processed sequentially, we propose strategies for adding and deleting features based on the updated relative discernibility relations. To exploit the strategies, we design two incremental versions for fuzzy rough set based feature selection. One updates the relative discernibility relations and the feature subset as sample subsets arrive sequentially, and outputs the feature subset where there is no sample subset. The other only updates the relative discernibility relations as sample subsets arrive continuously, and then computes the feature subset where no sample subset is left, which is just the feature subset from the whole dataset. The experimental results demonstrate the following facts: 1) our incremental approach

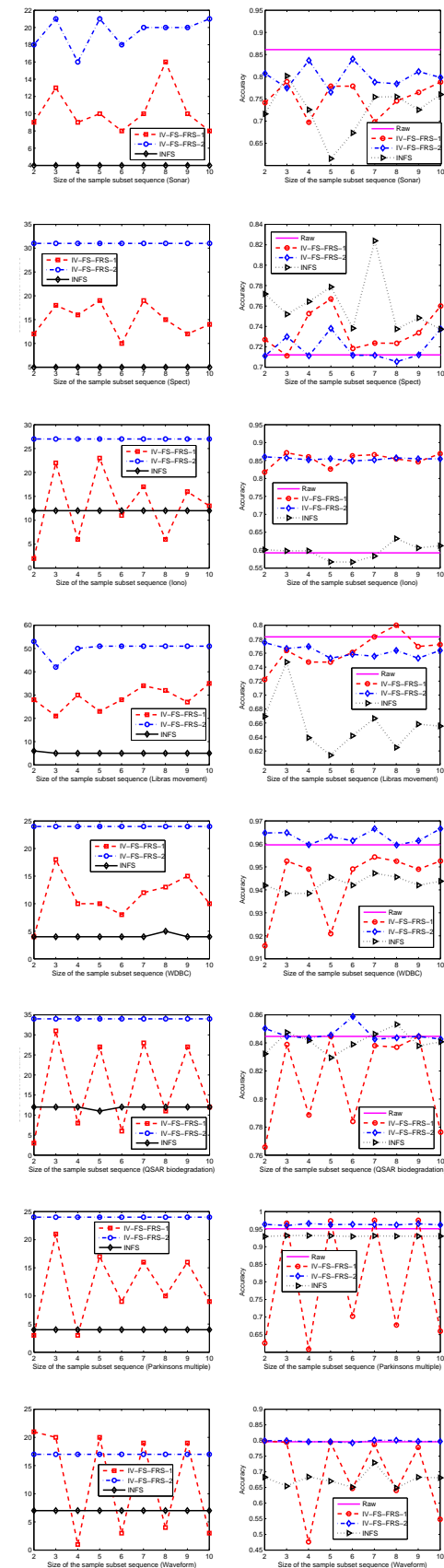


Fig. 5: Number and accuracy of features selected by IV-FS-FRS-1, IV-FS-FRS-2 and INFS as the size of the sample subset sequence changes.

can expedite feature selection based fuzzy rough set; 2) it is possible to employ our incremental approach to handle large datasets; 3) our second version is more efficient than our first one.

Based on the above results, some further investigations are as follows:

1) The global optimisation techniques can find a global optimal feature subset that may improve the accuracy of a classifier to some extent. As suggested, hence, we will focus on the incremental mechanisms for the global optimal method to improve the time efficiency.

2) To overcome the excess storage of fuzzy relation matrices, we will design a novel incremental method for feature selection so that it can efficiently handle big datasets.

3) Considering the feasibility of the true sliding window, we will introduce it into the incremental process of feature subset, in order to further accelerate fuzzy rough set based feature selection and improve the accuracy of feature subset.

4) We will investigate how to select the size of the sample subset sequence.

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**Yanyan Yang** Yanyan Yang received the BSc degree from the School of Science, North University of China, Taiyuan, China, in 2010 and the MSc degree from the Department of Mathematics and Physics, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China, in 2013. She is currently working toward the Ph.D. degree with the School of Control and Computer Engineering, North China Electric Power University. Since October, 2015, she has visited University of Ulster as a Joint Ph.D. student sponsored by China Scholarship Council for one year. Her

current research interests include rough sets, fuzzy sets and machine learning.



include fuzzy groups, fuzzy algebra, fuzzy analysis, rough sets, machine learning.

**Degang Chen** Degang Chen received the M.S. degree from Northeast North University, Changchun, Jilin, China, in 1994 and the Ph. D. degree from the Harbin Institute of Technology, Harbin, China, in 2000. He was a Postdoctoral Fellow with Xiafan Jiaotong University, Xiafan, China, from 2000 to 2002, and with Tsinghua University, Beijing, China, from 2002 to 2004. Since 2006, he has been a Professor with North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China. He has authored or coauthored more than 140 research publications. His research interests



combinatorial data analytics, and their applications in image, video, spectra and text analysis. He has over 200 publications in these areas.

**Hui Wang** Hui Wang received BSc degree in computer science from Jilin University of China in 1985 and then went on a three-year MSc program in artificial intelligence. From 1988 to 1992, he worked at Jilin University as a lecturer. In early 1993, he went to Northern Ireland to begin a doctoral program and completed the DPhil degree in informatics in 1996. He is currently a Professor in Computer Science and the head of Artificial Intelligence and Applications Research Group, University of Ulster. His research interests are machine learning, logics and reasoning,



of ShenZhen University. His major research interests include uncertainty modeling and machine learning for big data. He has edited 10+ special issues and published 3 monographs, 2 textbooks, and 200+ peer-reviewed research papers. By the Google scholar, the total number of citations is over 5000 and the maximum number of citation for a single paper is over 200. He is on the list of Elsevier 2015/2016 most cited Chinese authors. As a Principle Investigator (PI) or co-PI, his has completed 30+ research projects. He has supervised more than 100 Mphil and PhD students.

He is an IEEE Fellow, the previous BoG member of IEEE SMC society, the chair of IEEE SMC Technical Committee on Computational Intelligence, the Chief Editor of Machine Learning and Cybernetics Journal, and associate editors for a couple of journals in the related areas. He was the recipient of the IEEE SMCS Outstanding Contribution Award in 2004 and the recipient of IEEE SMCS Best Associate Editor Award in 2006. He is the general Co-Chair of the 2002IC 2017 International Conferences on Machine Learning and Cybernetics, cosponsored by IEEE SMCS. He was a distinguished lecturer of the IEEE SMCS.

**Xizhao Wang** Xizhao WANG received his PhD in computer science from Harbin Institute of Technology on September 1998. From 1998 to 2001, he worked at Department of Computing in Hong Kong Polytechnic University as a research fellow. From 2001 to 2014, he served in Hebei University as a professor and the dean of school of Mathematics and Computer Sciences. He was the founding Director of Key Lab. on Machine Learning and Computational Intelligence in Hebei Province. From 2014 to now, he worked as a professor in Big Data Institute